

OLD COTTON PRESS
DUNHAM PLANTATION
NEAR HELENA, ALA

ALA. 422

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52- HEL.V

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PIONEER REMNANTS - OLD COTTON PRESS.
Helena, Shelby County, Alabama.

59- HEL.V

1A

Ownership:

Present Owner: Harold R. Dunham.

Previous Owners: Robert Thomas Dunham.

Date of Erection: Approximately 1840.Builder: Robert Thomas Dunham.Present Condition: State of Disintegration:

Materials of Construction: Oak; the frame work of the press, which is composed of hand-hewn timbers (marks of the broadax still visible) was fastened together with wooden pegs. The shaft or screw was made from a solid white oak log and threaded by hand with hammer and chisel.

The man who fashioned it was an artist in his profession. There is much speculation today as to how the maker was able to get the right pitch to his threads. Some idea of the task that confronted him may be gained by imagining a smooth log 17" in diameter by nearly 14' long with threads to be cut an inch deep in it. That was what the maker of this screw did. Home-made soap, tallow and mutton suet were used for lubrication and probably account for its excellent state of preservation. Resistance was so little that one man could run the screw up or down, by pushing one of the slanting levers.

Other Existing Records:

See: Birmingham News, May 31, 1936.

"ANCIENT SHELBY COUNTY COTTON PRESS
MAY SOME DAY BE PLACED IN MUSEUM"
By Harold R. Dunham. Helena, Alabama.

Additional Data: In central Shelby County, a dozen miles north of Montevallo, stands a gaunt and ragged sentinel, marking a past era in the South's No. 1 industry - cotton:

Partly rotted away, leaning precariously as if ready to fall, this old cotton press is probably yet the best preserved of the very few left in the Southern States.

Passers-by along the old Montevallo and Elyton road nearby, would no doubt be surprised to know that Henry Ford's Edison Institute Museum of Dearborn Michigan was desirous of adding this olden wooden screw cotton press to its so-called "Southern" collection of Southern historical pieces. Pictures of this press have been made at the special request of Dr. T. Van Hyning, director of the Florida institutions museum. They have also been made for the Marshall-Field Museum in Chicago, and Birmingham's Public Library. There is no definite reason why any one would suspect its historical value; it isn't an imposing or pretentious structure. On the contrary, it is inclined to be drab looking, but it is a relic just the same, and an interesting one, at that.

Source of Material:

Harold R. Dunham.
Helena, Alabama.

Compiled by:

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